THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The recommendations of Justice Talwar Committee are under consideration of the Government.

Post Offices in Tribal Areas of Karnataka

3719. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are some villages and tribal areas and mountaineous areas in Karnataka where there is no Post Office as on 30th June, 1998;

(b) if so, the number thereof; and

(c) the time by when post offices will be set up there?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) 170 villages in tribal areas and 670 villages in hilly areas do not have post Offices.

(c) The Opening of new Post Office is subject to the fulfilment of justification based on norms and availability of required resources. A target for Opening of 2 new Extra Departmental Branch Post Offices in tribal areas of Karnataka has been fixed for the year 1998-99.

Telephone Connections in Sultanpur District of Uttar Pradesh

3720. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH SURYA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) The target fixed for providing telephones in rural areas of District Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh and has that been achieved;

(b) If not, reasons thereof;

(c) Whether Gram Pradhan of Misirpur Jalalpur in Kadi Pur tehsil of Sultanpur approached for a connection;

(d) If so, action taken thereon; and

(e) Whether there is any proposal to open a telephone exchange which would cover the Gram Sabha mentioned above?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) Target was fixed for the year 1997-98 for Village Public Telephones for covering 230 vollages in Sultanpur district. The achievement is 321 UPTs.

(b) Not applicable in view of (a) above.

(c) Prabhan of Misirpur, Jalalpur applied for VPT at Balua and not for village Misirpur Jalalpur.

(d) Since the VPT No. 6621 in village Balua of Gram Sabha Misirpur Jalalpur is existing from Karaudi Kalan exchange, therefore, another VPT cannot be provided in the same village as per existing policy.

(e) There is no registered demand at Misirpur Jalalpur, however there is a plan to open an exchange at Akhandpur, 9 Kms away from Misirpur Jalalpur.

Foreign Firms Interested in Providing Internet Services

3721. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have finalised their views on the question of ending monopoly of the Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) over the Internet as they are unable to meet the growing demand for new connections;

(b) if so, the present status of the deliberations;

(c) whether some foreign firms have shown interest to provide Internet connections to certain towns like Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada etc. through satellite link; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) and (b) A policy decision has been taken by the Government to privatise the provision of Internet Services and to end the monopoly of the VSNL over the Internet. Detailed guide lines and licensing conditions for Internet Service Providers were announced on 15.1.1998. As per the policy announced any Indian registered company having a foreign equity participation, if any, to a maximum of 49%, shall be eligible for award of ISP licence. However, the TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) vide its order dated 17.2.1998 invalidated the Internet Licensing Policy on the ground that Licenses, were not obtained. The Department of Telecommunications had filed an appeal against the decision of TRAI in the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi and the Court has pronounced its Judgment on the issue on 16.7.1998 and set aside the order of TRAI. The full text of the judgment is awaited. The Government will take further action in the light of the Court's judgment.

(c) As per above no foreign firm shall be eligible for award of ISP licences.

(d) Does not arise in view of (c) above.

Shifting of Postal Accounts Offices

3722. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether separate postal accounts offices of Assam Postal Circle Guwahati and North Eastern postal Circle, Shillong was created;

(b) if so, the objective and date of creation of those offices;

(c) whether necessary accommodation for the Assam Postal Circle Accounts office was offered at the old post office building, Guwahati; and

(d) if so, the reasons for not shifting the office from Calcutta defeating its objective, and when this is likely to be operated from Guwahati?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Question does not arise in view of reply to (a) above.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) The proposal for opening separate Postal Accounts Office at Guwahati is under consideration. However, no time frame has been fixed for the same.

Conference of SAARC Telecommunications Ministers

3723. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a Conference of SAARC Telecommunications Ministers was recently held in Colombo; and

(b) if so, what were major decisions taken therein?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Major decisions include;

To promote cooperation in the enhancement of telecommunication links and utilisation of Information Technologies within the SAARC region.

To minimise disparities with and among Member States in the telecommunications field.

To harness telecommunication Technology for the social and economic upliftment of the region and enhanced cooperation in technology transfer, standardisation and human resource development.

To evolve a coordinated approach on issue of common concern in international telecommunications fora.